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ABSTRACT

The California Partnership Academies Program is a highly successful school/business collaboration that allows students who are at risk of not graduating from high school to see clearly the connection between school and the workplace. The following key components are discussed: (1) an at-risk student population made up largely of the educationally disadvantaged; (2) interrelated academic and technical courses tailored to the career interests and needs of the students and local businesses; (3) smaller than average class size; (4) careful monitoring of individual student performance and attendance by teachers who have expressed a desire to work with these students; (5) tutoring and individualized instruction; (6) counseling services from a specially assigned guidance advisor who provides a full range of support services, including agency referrals; (7) emphasis on parent involvement, with frequent contact between the school and parents; (8) incentive awards given to highlight student achievement; (9) first-hand exposure to career information through field trips, guest speakers, and a mentor program; and (10) summer job opportunities for students who successfully complete their second year (grade 11) of the program, and for students who are on target for graduation during the last semester of their senior year. A chart illustrating a student's progression and schedule is included. A list of seven references is appended. (FMW)

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THE CALIFORNIA PARTNERSHIP ACADEMIES

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THE CALIFORNIA PARTNERSHIP ACADEMIES

Introduction

Today's intensely competitive international marketplace makes high school performance and students' transition to work concerns that are vitally important to California and to the nation as a whole. Employer groups maintain that the essential requirements for entry-level workers are literacy, basic skills in writing and in mathematics, positive attitudes toward work, and the ability to learn. Jobs demanding such requirements continue to increase, leading to an even greater demand for a workforce with basic job skills. Yet, many high schools are turning out an ever-increasing number of students who do not meet these basic requirements.

In the late nineteen seventies, Sequoia Union High School District was experiencing rapid growth in its percentage of educationally disadvantaged minority students and other students who were confronting major personal problems, such as substance abuse. There were growing concerns about the dropout rate of many of these students, who were alienated from and indifferent toward the educational process and did not associate their high school education experience with any realistic post-high school aspirations. To address these issues, the Sequoia Union High School District, the Stanford Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition, and a group of high technology companies located in the northern portion of California's Silicon Valley came together to form the Partnership Academies Program in 1981.

The rationale for the Academies Program was simple: There were many corporations in the area that had jobs for which employees with adequate work skills could not be found. At the same time, economically and educationally disadvantaged youth in the area were dropping out of high school with no job skills and little motivation to succeed. The Academies Program joined industry and public education in a partnership to provide an academic/technical/career-development training program that was specifically designed to address the needs of underachieving students.

The Partnership Academies Program has become a highly successful school/business collaboration which allows students who are at risk of not graduating from high school.to see clearly the connection between school and the workplace. The Academies are three-year schools-within-a-school that offer these students (who are generally low-achievers and who

differ from their more successful peers in self-esteem, task performance, and career aspirations) an integrated vocational academic curriculum, career development, enrichment activities, extensive counseling, and work experience. The program makes their educational experience meaningful by linking academic course work with vocational education and employment opportunities in local businesses.

The active participation of business is central to the program. In the first Partnership Academies Program, major local electronics companies (Hewlett-Packard, Varian, Lockheed, and others) were involved in program development from the outset. The present Academies Program gives business partners a central role in shaping the success of the program. An advisory committee, primarily composed of business personnel, participates in the operation of the Academies in numerous well-defined ways: as policy-makers, as fund raisers, as curriculum developers and reviewers, as hosts of field trips, and as mentors. Committee members make presentations about the Academies to potential supporters of the program and encourage support and resources from other businesses. California's business community is responsible for the expansion of the Partnership Academies. Led by the electronics industry in Silicon Valley, business executives helped shape the replication legislation, supported it in the legislature, and convinced the Governor to fund it. One industry representative described business's role when he said, "We are corporate citizens. We have a responsibility for affirmative action and for providing economic opportunity."

The program proved to be so successful that the California State Department of Education designated the Partnership Academies as a model school-to-work program for high-risk youth. Bills were passed by the California legislature in 1984 and 1987, first to replicate the Academies and then to expand these replications. State support has risen from $150,000 in 1984-85 to over $2,000,000 in 1989-90. At present, there are over 40 replications of the Partnership Academies in California. The growth of the Academies and the state funding for them is an excellent example of state public education policy responding to research evidence about a model which resulted in improved outcomes for youth at risk of dropping out of high school.

The Academy Model: Methodology and Curriculum

The Academy Model is a unique and complex school/business venture that makes a change in the total environment of at-risk students. The goals of the program are to:

1. meet the academic and vocational training needs of a largely disadvantaged population of students who are not succeeding in traditional school programs, who are likely to become dropouts, and who lack employable skills for entry-level positions in the selected field of training.
2. build a partnership between business and the public schools by satisfying the needs of companies for employees in rapidly growing fields of employment such as business technology and health care.
3. confront the problem of youth unemployment among the target population and to establish a model for dealing with youth unemployment for possible use in other schools, districts and localities.

Students who are identified as being at-risk of dropping out (e.g., those who have grade point averages of less than 2.0, are behind in credits, have a history of poor attendance, and have shown a disinterest in the regular academic program) are recruited for the program toward the end of ninth grade, enter the program in the tenth grade, and continue in the program until graduation. Key components of the program are:

- an at-risk student population made up largely of the educationally disadvantaged;
- inter-related academic and technical courses tailored to the career interests and needs of the students and local business;
- smaller than average class size (20-25 students);
- careful monitoring of individual student performance and attendance by teachers who have expressed a desire to work with these students;
- tutoring and individualized instruction;
- counseling services from a specially assigned guidance advisor who provides a full range of support services, including agency referrals;
- emphasis on parent involvement, with frequent contact between the school and parents;
- incentive awards given to highlight students' achievement;
- first-hand exposure to career information through field trips, guest speakers, and a mentor program; and

- summer job opportunities for students who successfully complete their second year (grade 11) in the program and during the last semester of their senior year for those students who are on target for graduation.

Academies students are enrolled in a core academic program consisting of key disciplines: usually English, mathematics, social studies and a vocational training laboratory course. The curriculum of the core academic courses and the vocational course is integrated and taught in a school-within-a-school format. Other services students receive include career development, counseling, and mentoring. As a result of the training they receive in the Academies Program the students are expected to:

1. master the core academic courses.
2. acquire salable vocational competencies.
3. develop employability skills for functioning in the workplace.
4. have their self-esteem raised to a level where they aspire to a career path which will lead them out of the cycle of poverty, substance abuse and welfare.

In grades 11 and 12, students who meet Academies standards are rewarded with well-paying jobs in local businesses.

The most important aspect of the Academies Model is the integration of the vocational program with core academic subjects in a way that lets students see the importance of their academic subjects in the world of work. Each student takes the core academic and the vocational courses during the three-year program. The vocational courses are designed to fit the participating industry. They range from business technology, health services, electronics, to careers in the hospitality industry. As the Partnership Academies grow, the programs have become increasing creative in their industry focus. Recently funded Academies are centered around career opportunities in the media, seaports, agri-business, and the IRS!

Each Academy course includes practical experience in applying the course skills to work situations as well as covering the standard course content. For example, the teachers in the Business Technology Academies use the California Vocational Education Model Curriculum Standards and proven techniques from their collective experiences with at-risk students to develop instructional units that involve students in solving everyday business problems. In a business unit on entrepreneurship, students in mathematics might be asked to calculate the start-up costs of a new business, in English to write a paper on venture capitalism, and in social studies to secure applications for business licenses from local governmental entities.

A major emphasis of many Academies is to combine computer skills (e.g., keyboarding, word processing, setting up and using data bases and spreadsheets for business computations and communications, electronic mail and networks) for business with thinking and problem-solving skills so that upon graduating students can advance quickly beyond entry-level jobs. Throughout the Academies Program problem analysis and solution is emphasized: identifying the problem, analyzing available resources/tools, working out a step-by-step solution. This process is applied at all levels, from learning writing, math, and social studies skills to dealing with job relationships, to planning a career. Current research into metacognition, mental models, decision making, learning styles, and other research is used by Academies teachers to design the thinking and problem-solving skills portion of the curriculum, which is integrated with the academic and vocational course content.

Another important component of the program focuses on teaching students the concept of career advancement and its relationship to being an independent, responsible problem solver. Students learn about job paths in companies and "try their hands" at a number of activities with advancement potential, such as office management, desk-top publishing and making presentations. For example, a student team might be asked to make a presentation on a new software database manager to a sales team. The team is assigned full responsibility for the preparation of visuals and handouts, organization of the room, preparation for anticipated questions, and for giving the actual presentation. In the process, team members learn to apply and practice basic cognitive skills. Emphasis is on thoroughness of preparation, presentation skills, responsibility, and follow through, as well as on computer skills.

Recruitment of the target population begins during the spring semester of ninth grade. A number of factors are considered: grades, socioeconomic status, attendance, potential, etc. Presentations are made to at-risk students to elicit interest, and contacts are made with families. Prospective students and their families are invited to meet with the Academies staff to reinforce the importance of family support and involvement.

ACADEMIES STUDENT PROGRESSION AND SCHEDULE

Semester	Grade 10	Grade 11	Summer	Grade 12
FALL	Students enter program Classes: English, math, social studies Required classes (non-Academies) and elective Field trips Speakers	Classes: English, math, social studies Students matched with mentors Required classes (non-Academies) and elective Field trips Speakers	Students who are performing adequately are provided summer jobs in local companies	Classes: Economics English Focus on employment skills Required classes (non-Academies) and elective
SPRING	Same as above	Same as above		Students spend afternoons in work experience position at a local company

Although the Academies Program is designed as a three-year commitment, exceptions can be made to admit students at the second semester of their sophomore year or even at the beginning of their junior year, providing there is space available and the staff agrees that the student can succeed without the earlier phases of the program.

Academies classes are block-scheduled. The students spend their first four periods in the morning in their vocational/technology course and core academic courses. For the remainder of the day, they attend other required or elective courses (e.g., physical education, fine arts, foreign language, science) with the rest of the student body. In their senior year, students are expected to complete a full semester of economics, which incorporates elements of both personal and business economics. The Academies curriculum meets all California requirements for high school graduation and for community college entrance.

The Academies Program also has a strong career development component that stresses job readiness skills, career planning, researching a company, preparing a résumé, interview techniques, applying to college, etc. An increasing number of Academies are establishing linkages with local colleges and universities. Community college counselors are invited to make presentations concerning further vocational training. This component is designed to instill in students a sense that they will most likely need further education for future work options.

The curriculum of the Academies, especially the vocational/technical training, is reinforced by a variety of enrichment activities provided by the partnership with business: field trips, speakers from industry, site tours of participating companies, and mentors. Awards and ceremonies that highlight students' achievement (e.g., pizza luncheons for "Students of the Month") are frequent. Parents and mentors are invited to these events. Recognition of students' achievement indicates the positive approach used in the Academies to build self-esteem in the students. Instead of penalizing them for doing something wrong, the Academies takes the proactive stance of rewarding students for doing something right. In many, if not most instances these events represent the first positive recognition these students have received in high school. The ceremonies also emphasize the importance of parent participation and support.

In the eleventh grade, a mentor is assigned to each Academy student. Mentors are employees of participating businesses who serve as student role models, helping to make what the student is learning in school relevant to the demands of the workplace. Mentors also act as a resource by helping the student develop work skills. Most importantly, they can give disadvantaged students the incentive they need to stay in school. Mentors let students see the payoff firsthand.

Typical mentor/student activities in the Academies include the following:

- Student visits mentor's workplace and "shadows" mentor for a day.
- Mentor and student discuss potential careers in area of training and requisite post-secondary education or training.
- Mentor discusses basic work habits with student.
- Mentor helps student prepare for job interviews, prepare résumé, etc.
- Mentor and student attend events (e.g., job fairs, sports, cultural) together.

Work Experience

Although business makes non-personnel contributions to the Academies (e.g., cash contributions, donations of equipment, and use of its facilities for field trip sites), its most important function is to provide jobs for Academies students. The work experience is the most critical part of the Academies Program. Students who successfully complete two years in the program and receive recommendations from their teachers work full-time in the summer after their junior year and half-time in the second semester of their senior year. Students who are not on track for graduation must go to summer school. For most students, the chance to obtain a good job is the major Academy incentive. Teachers also profit from the extensive exposure to the business community required in an Academies Program. As they monitor their students in the workplace and work with the business mentors, they learn first hand about the changes occurring in the business world.

Every effort is made to place students in jobs that are closely related to their career interests. For example, a student interested in entrepreneurship might be placed in a small shopping center business, whereas a student interested in computer technology would be placed in one of the high tech companies. The Academies job coordinator maintains close contact with supporting businesses in order to keep abreast of the number and kinds of jobs available. Information received from this relationship facilitates placement of students who are best qualified for the available jobs. Students apply for these jobs just as they would in the open market, i.e., they prepare job application forms and résumés and go for interviews. They receive extensive help from Academies teachers in this process. Mentors may accompany students on job interviews and acquaint them with the process.

Work experience exposes students to the variety of job opportunities in their vocational field. An academy student said, "The work was the best part. It was the only way I could understand what the textbooks were about." Students are closely supervised in their jobs and evaluated by their job supervisors the end of the employment period. Work experience introduces students to expectations in the workplace concerning dress, language, behavior. Academies students must be responsible, dependable, and punctual, and, they must work well with others. It is important that they understand that they represent their schools, their communities, and most importantly, their fellow Academies students. All are told, "If you like your job and the good pay you are earning, thank the seniors; they paved the way for you."

Evaluation

The Academies are one of the few dropout prevention programs that have been evaluated systematically. Since 1981, private corporations and foundations have supported rigorous evaluations of Sequoia Union High School District's initial Academies and in the past three years the entire statewide effort. Evaluation reports on the progress of the students in the Partnership Academies were issued annually from 1981 to 1986 by the American Institutes of Research and from 1987 to 1989 by Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). The evaluations were designed to track hard data outcome measures as well as local perceptions of program success.

These evaluations employed a comparison group design, i.e., data was collected on the Academies students and a matched group of similar non-Academies students. Matches were made on the basis of descriptive indicators (age, grade level, gender, ethnicity) and school records (attendance, credits, courses failed, grade point average, and standardized test scores in reading and mathematics). Comparisons were made between the two groups each year on five outcome measures: retention in school, attendance, credits earned, courses failed, and grade point averages

The conclusions have been positive. Statistical tests of differences between Academy and comparison group members were conducted across three years for the school years 1985-86 through 1987-88. Of 212 tests of differences between Academy and comparison group students in 11 different replication sites, 61 were statistically significant in favor of Academy students and 11 in favor of comparison groups. The differences were spread about equally across four variables: attendance, credits earned, courses failed and grade point averages. The dropout rate among the comparison group was twice that of the students in the Academies.

Questionnaires administered to students, parents and industry personnel were another important source of information about the program. Parents strongly endorsed the Partnership Academies teaching staff, the small classes, and the individual attention students receive. According to their responses, their students' needs for special help were being met more effectively than in the past. Mentors responding to assessment questionnaires said that the mentor program was worthwhile. Many reported positive changes in their personal attitudes about the public schools as a result of their association with the Partnership Academies.

The most telling testimony of success comes from the students themselves. Questionnaires showed that students found classwork more interesting because they could see the connection between school and work and they liked school better as a result of being in the Academies. Three-fourths of the students queried showed an increase in self-esteem due to the program and that students felt that their success was due not to luck but to their own efforts. At an Academies graduation ceremony, a senior told the audience, "I'm eighteen and I've had three jobs--all of them at major companies. I've never tossed a fry or slapped a burger, and thanks to the Academies I won't have to. I've been handed my future on a silver platter, and I intend to take it!".

Academies students have fared well in postsecondary employment and/or education. In a recent longitudinal study (Stern, et al. 1989) it was found that 94 percent of the students surveyed in follow-up studies were working or were going to school or were doing both. Surveys also showed that Academies graduates had made long-range career plans and had sustained these plans well after graduation from high school. There is compelling evidence that when the Academy Model is fully implemented, it decreases the dropout rate, increases student academic achievement through the medium of vocational education, and leads to post-graduation employment in the fields in which the students were trained.

Summary

The Academy Model has proven to be an outstanding solution to growing local and national concerns about high school dropouts, a dwindling workforce, the inadequate skills of young people (even those who do graduate from high school), and the over-all need for adaptable, skilled workers. A Public Private Ventures study of school-business partnerships cited the Academies as "the best single model in the country for business involvement in the schools" The program has received a number of awards which include being named as a exemplary program by the National Academy for Vocational Education in 1985, a Private Sector Initiative commendation from the President of the United States in 1986, and a Distinguished Performance Award from the National Alliance for Business in 1987.

The Partnership Academies are demonstrating that the holistic approach—based on the premise that the integration of vocational/technical education with basic academic skills can be used to break the cycle of disaffection with school programs which leads to joblessness for

so many disadvantaged youth—definitely works. Restructuring the learning experience to provide a curriculum that reinforces academic content and thinking skills through vocational training and work experience can indeed curtail the dropout syndrome and provide students with the motivational tools so necessary for success in the school setting and as adults in the working world.

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